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CONTINUING UNREST IN KOREA IS FEARED

U.S. Worried That Military Will Try to Maintain Dictatorship After Putting Down Rebellion

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WASHINGTON, May 27 — High-ranking Administration officials said today that the United States was deeply worried over the possibility that South Korean military leaders, having quelled a civilian rebellion in Kwangju, might try to maintain a semblance of military dictatorship in South Korea.

"I view the situation as very dangerous," one senior State Department official said. The Administration's concern was that the South Korean population, having been promised an end to authoritarian rule, would not accept a new regime headed by Lieut. Gen. Chon Too Hwan, and that further disorders were a possibility.

In addition, American intelligence officials said that General Chon did not have the backing of all the senior officers and that the possibility of fragmentation within the South Korean military could not be dismissed.

With some 39,000 American troops stationed in South Korea, and about that many having lost their lives in the Korean War, whose 30th anniversary falls next month, the United States has always had a deep interest in political developments in that strategically located country.

U.S. Concern Over Korea Is Strong

The concern about Korea has been strong in this Administration because of President Carter's decision, later suspended, to withdraw all combat troops, and because of the Administration's pressure on South Korean authorities to liberalize their society, a trend that seemed to be picking up momentum immediately after the assassination of President Park Chung Hee last October.

But General Chon and his military supporters took control of the military in December and earlier this month imposed martial law throughout the country following demonstrations protesting the slowed-down pace of liberalization.

The military operation in Kwangju was regarded as inevitable by Administration officials who had earlier counseled maximum restraint on the part of both civilians and military to avoid heavy casualties. However, one official said today that the number of those reported killed in the fighting yesterday was "happily on the low side."

Publicly, the State Department said that it regretted that the situation in Kwangju had "reached the point that it did." But the fact that there was now relative calm was seen by American officials as providing a chance to find ways of ending the domestic crisis.

'Spirit of Reconciliation'

The State Department said that "it is most important that the underlying issues be addressed in a spirit of reconciliation of all elements of Korean society."

Since the imposition of martial law 10 days ago, many prominent civilian politicians have been arrested, much to the United States' concern. These include Kim Dae Jung, the opposition leader, who is from South Cholla province of which Kwangju is the capital, and Kim Jong Pil, Prime Minister under President Park, who is the leader of the ruling Democratic Republican Party.

The State Department said that it wanted "progress to be resumed toward establishment of a broadly based civilian government." There seems, however, to be little inclination at this time by the United States to do more than exhort the South Koreans to accept its advice. One senior official, asked today what the United States was going to do, replied, "Do you have any ideas?"

Firm U.S. Action Urged

Korean-Americans seeking a more liberal government in South Korea have urged Washington to act more firmly, but the Administration for the moment does not want to do anything that might contribute to instability in South Korea.

If the United States is seen as directly opposed to General Chon, officials said, it could touch off disorders within the Korean military. The hope here is for a mixture of private and public persuasion to turn the South Koreans back toward civilian rule.

Meanwhile, officials said there were still no signs that North Korea was preparing any action against South Korea, though North Korean forces were reported on maximum alert. One official said there were some signs of increased efforts by North Korea to infiltrate agents into the South, perhaps to capitalize on the disorders.